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VAGABUNDULI LIBELLUS.

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BY

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS,

AUTHOR OF 'ANIMI FIGURA," "MANY MOODS," ETC.

LONDON:
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE.
1884.

APR 22

VAGO CUIDAM

VAGABUNDULI LIBELLUM

CUJUS PARS MAGNA VENETIIS SCRIPTA

VAGANS POETA

D.D.

VENETIIS MDCCCLXXXIV.

PREFACE.

THE title of this volume sufficiently explains its scope and purpose. It is the little book of a wanderer; and it is dedicated to a wanderer—Vago Cuidam, a phrase borrowed from one of Petrarch's familiar letters. Since all men on this earth are wanderers, this dedication may be taken as addressed to himself by any one who finds an echo of his thought or feeling in my verse.

The second section demands some words of comment. I wrote it to supplement and to explain what is defective and unintelligible in a collection of sonnets called ANIMI FIGURA,

published by me in 1882. *"Stella Maris" forms in fact the transition from "Intellectual Isolation" to "Self-Condemnation" in that book.*

The portrait of a beauty-loving and impulsive but at the same time self-tormenting and conscientious mind, which I attempted to display in ANIMI FIGURA, *was incomplete and inexplicable without the episode of passionate experience set forth in "Stella Maris."*

These explanations had to be made upon the appearance of "Stella Maris" in VAGABUNDULI LIBELLUS; *for I wish it to be understood that the sonnets which compose that section were intended for the fictitious character of* ANIMI FIGURA. *Few things are more difficult than to express imagined emotions in a lyrical form; and in so far as any success may be attained in this attempt, the poet exposes himself to the danger of misconstruc-*

tion. It is taken for granted that he is describing his own experience, although, as in the present case, he may have sought to adumbrate the form which feelings common to all men assume in some specific and perhaps abnormal personality constructed by his fancy.

To tell a story in a series of sonnets, is no easy task, because the effort to do so puts a severe strain upon the law whereby the sonnet lives. That form of verse is not designed for continuous narration, but for the crystallization of thought around isolated points of emotion, passion, meditation, or remembrance. I have therefore omitted from "Stella Maris" such connecting links as ought assuredly to have been supplied if this love-episode had been presented in prose or idyll, or in any of the numerous types of narrative verse. What remains will be enough,

I trust, to explain how the fictitious character I endeavoured to portray in ANIMI FIGURA, *yields to a passion which overmasters the man at first, how his acquired habits of self-analysis necessitate doubt and conflict at the very moment of fruition, and how he becomes aware of a discord not only between his own tone of feeling and that of the woman who attracted him, but also between the emotion she inspired and his inalienable ideal of love. In a moment of disillusionment he roughly rejects what he had ardently desired, because he finds himself upon the verge of disloyalty to his superior nature. That his conscience should be vehemently stirred in this unsatisfactory climax of an adventure on which he had staked much, is consistent with the tenor of his temperament. The sense of failure is intensified by the memory of previous moods*

(*set forth in* ANIMI FIGURA, *pp.* 15—31) *which had been inspired by somewhat arrogant self-confidence.*

It only remains for me to add that while a few of the sonnets in VAGABUNDULI LIBELLUS *have already appeared in print (and for permission to republish them my thanks are due to Messrs. Smith and Elder), by far the larger part are now published for the first time.*

DAVOS PLATZ, *March* 1884.

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THE SEA CALLS.

THE SEA CALLS.

I.

BROAD shadowy mountains and the boundless plain
And silver streak of ocean part us, friend,
Since that last night in Venice and the end
Of our souls' conflict in a throb of pain.
The stillness of these hills, these woods, again
Folds me disquieted; while you ascend
Heights hitherto unsought, which lightnings renu,
Where strife and tumult and ambition reign.
Come back, come back! The smooth sea calleth you.
The waves that break on Lido cry to me.
England and Alps divide us; but the blue
Breadth of those slumberous waters, calm yet free,
The azure of those deep wild eyes we knew,
Will bring both home to Venice, to the sea.

II.

AWAY, away! The ruffling breezes call;
The slack waves rippling at the smooth flat keel;
The swanlike swerving of the queenly steel;
The sails that flap against their masts and fall;
The dip of oars in time, the musical
Cry of the statue-poised lithe gondolier;
The scent of seaweeds from the sea-girt mere;
The surge that frets on Malamocco's wall;
The solitary gun San Giorgio peals;
The murmurous pigeons, pensioners of St. Mark;
The deep tongues of the slender campaniles;
The song that fitful floats across the dark;
All sounds, all sights, all scents born of the sea,
Venezia, call and call me back to thee!

III.

TO-NIGHT with noise of multitudinous rills,
Snow-swollen in full midsummer by the breeze
That blows from Italy, our silent hills
Plain to the stars; dry granite-grappling trees,
From whose hard boughs the unwilling gum distils,
Yield, as in grief, Arabian fragrances,
Waving their plumes, which the wild south wind fills
With moaning music, plangent litanies.
I through this clamour of hoarse streams, this wail
Of woods despoiled that weep beneath the storm,
Too soft, too sweet for our stern upland vale,
Hear only one deep message borne to me,
From dark lagoon, from glimmering isle, from warm
Venetian midnight—hear the calling sea.

IV.

LIGHTNING; and o'er those hills the rattling shock
Of Alpine thunder, short, a dropping fire;
Unformidable here, but on yon spire,
Where snow lies ridged, splintering the solid rock.
Slow heat; the stout hinds swink in sweating smock;
The milking maidens pant by ben and byre;
No sooner cut than carried, high and higher
The scented hay is stored by swathe and shock.
Such is our summer. Village greybeards swear
They nor their fathers felt so sultry air.
But I sit mute: how metal-molten glows
Thy burnished sea; one flame; flamboyant dyes
Of sulphur deepening into gold and rose!
How o'er thy bell-towers boom those thunderous skies!

v.

THOU art not clamorous. Nay, thy silvery tongue
And rhetoric that holds me night and noon
Attentive to one tender monotone,
Are clear as fairy chimes by lilies rung.
They speak of twilight and grave ditties sung
By seamen brown beneath a low broad moon,
And breezes with the sea-scent in them blown
At sundown, when the few faint stars are hung
Dim overhead in fields of hyacinth blue;
When, lifted between sea and sky, those isles
North-gazing change from rose and blossoming rue
To privet paleness; and dark harbour piles
Bar the wide fire-irradiate west; wherethrough
Declining day, like a dead hero, smiles.

VI.

HOURS, weeks, and days bring round the golden moon;
While I still wait: I 'mid these solemn firs,
Late-flowering meadows and grey mountain spurs,
Watch summer fade and russet hues imbrune
The stern sad hills. All while thy smooth lagoon
Invites me; like a murmured spell recurs,
When south winds breathe and the cloud-landscape stirs,
One sombre sweet Venetian slumberous tune.
Arise: ere autumn's penury be spent;
Ere winter in a snow-shroud wrap the year;
Ere the last oleanders droop and die;
Take we the rugged ways that southward lie;
Seek by the sea those wide eyes sapphire-clear,
Those softened stars, that larger firmament.

STELLA MARIS.

STELLA MARIS.

I.

I MUSED on these last miseries of mankind:
On souls that, fainting, feed a nameless thirst;
On hearts that long, with self-loathed longing cursed;
On loves that know themselves shameful and blind
Fierce cruel loves that crucify the mind;
Dry hearts that throb and throb, yet cannot burst;
Souls that will hope, when hope is proved the worst
Of torments: and I cried, Dwells there behind
This world of phantoms which allure and fade—
This bubble-world, wherein 't is hell to feel,
Since action bred by feeling breaks the seal
Which seemed to clasp truth in the dreams we made—
Dwells there, unseized, unseen, what, once displayed,
Would prove our Maya-world of wishes real?

II.

MY spirit adream in Venice by the sea,
Roofed with that crystal dome of luminous sky,
Where the towered islands of enchantment lie,
Dallied with dark seductive reverie;
For soothing my life's smart with sympathy,
In self-contented calm, with curious eye,
Into despair's abyss I dared to pry,
Nor feared that Maya might descend on me.
Then o'er a level space of storm-swept sand,
Unsought, unsummoned, crept the stealthy shade,
And beckoned me with thin compulsive hand,
And showed me Thee! And, lo, thou wast arrayed
In flame by my soul's conflagration fanned!
The charm was woven, and my will obeyed.

III.

VENICE, thou Siren of sea-cities, wrought
By mirage, built on water, stair o'er stair,
Of sunbeams and cloud-shadows, phantom-fair,
With naught of earth to mar thy sea-born thought!
Thou floating film upon the wonder-fraught
Ocean of dreams! Thou hast no dream so rare
As are thy sons and daughters, they who wear
Foam-flakes of charm from thine enchantment caught!
O dark brown eyes! O tangles of dark hair!
O heaven-blue eyes, blonde tresses where the breeze
Plays over sun-burned cheeks in sea-blown air!
Firm limbs of moulded bronze! frank debonair
Smiles of deep-bosomed women! Loves that seize
Man's soul, and waft her on storm-melodies!

IV.

FAIR is the sea; and fair the sea-borne billow,
Blue from the depth and curled with crested argent:
Fair is the sea; and fair the smooth sea-margent,
The brown dunes waved with tamarisk and willow:
Fair is the sea; and fair the seaman's daughter,
Fairer than all fair things in earth and ocean:
Fair is the sea; and fair the wayward motion,
The wavering glint of light on dancing water:
Fair is the sea; and fair the heavens above it,
And fair at ebb the grass-green wildernesses:
Fair is the sea; and fair the stars that love it,
Rising from waves new-washed with orient tresses:
Fair is the sea; of all fair sea-things fairest,
Stella, thou sea-born star art best and rarest!

v.

WHEN thou wert born, star of the salt sea-spray,
Deep slumber brooded on the swarth lagoon;
The western heavens were silvered with a moon
Sinking beneath those Alpine ramparts grey:
'Twas the first morning of the month of May;
Long whispering wavelets lapped the Lido dune;
Shy breezes with a soft low under-tune
Plained to the orient skies of dawn's delay.
Then rose the star, Diana, and the foam,
Touched by her saffron tresses, throbbed with morn;
Night fled, light sped through all the ethereal dome;
Earth thrilled and felt the advent of her god;
But when his feet the blue sea-pavement trod,
In that first marriage moment thou wert born.

VI.

CHILD of the sea and sun-god, thou foam-born,
White as the foam, and as the dawn-star golden,
Healthful as scent of May-bloom unbeholden
In the dewed day-spring of the amorous morn!
Thou from that birth-hour blossoming still hast worn
The aureole of thy mystic morning splendour,
Glamour of sea-waves petulant and tender,
Perfume of air from pure sea-spaces borne.
Thou too along the sandy sea-marge roaming
In childhood's happier days hast caught the motion
Of billows rippling from the far free ocean;
Hast heard and learned the music of the water,
When through the veilèd night or violet gloaming
The great sea spake from silence to his daughter.

VII.

I SAW thee first, and knew not I should love thee,
Pacing the meadows where narcissus flowers
Star the green grass, and clustering stars above thee
Hung the white blossoms of acacia bowers.
Those rathe acacia branches wove a slender
Lattice of light and trembling leaves to shield thee;
Soft was the shade, and soft the shadowy splendour
Of sunbeams shed through flowers that half concealed thee.
Lap-full of stars, white buds and golden, fragrant
With perfume of the spring in all their bloom,
Singing a morning song to match the vagrant
Larks high in air above that leafy gloom,
Star of my soul, thou stood'st, and far before thee
Slept the blue sea, heaven's broad blue caverns o'er thee.

VIII.

As o'er a landscape when the winds are free
Cloud-shadows sail, and 'neath the changeful skies
All changes; for one scene is paradise,
Another steeped in brooding mystery:
So seems thy spirit when I gaze on thee;
For now thy smile is heaven, and now there rise
Visions of passionate hope that vex thine eyes,
And now thy mood is mere tranquillity.
Nor dare I dream, howe'er I muse upon
The life beneath those radiant limbs of thine,
That thou thyself art; like the form divine
That stirred to greet that sculptor's orison,
Thou needest love to wake thee; would 'twere mine
To be for thee thy soul's Pygmalion!

IX.

THESE salt sea-lakes, these smooth moon-silvered meres,
Have moods of petulant mischief, perilous wrath;
When to the skies the churned foam scuds in froth;
When black as hate around chafed harbour piers
Suck snake-like eddies; when the weltering broth,
Thick with brewed charms, 'neath close entangled spears
Of fiends in conflict scattering threats and fears,
Pants in short gasps; when damnèd Ashtaroth
Drives Venus from her sphere; and on the bar
Of Lido all night long the ruinous boom
Of breakers in rebellion, joust and jar,
Drowning the rain-drenched heavens with spouted spoom,
Threatens another deluge.—Thus, my star,
Hast thou thy moods of tempest and of doom!

X.

I FEAR thee when those fervent heavens of light
Aslumber in thine eyes of amethyst
Leap into sudden balefires; or some mist,
Blown like Scirocco in the sun's despite
Across the firmament of life's delight,
O'erspreads thy brow with cloud-films that resist
Love's proffered prayers and God-sent eucharist,
Drawing from unknown depths their power to blight.
I know not what of ominous from hell
Weighs on my heart's joy when I see thee thus,
Like to lost souls that suffer and rebel!
Some doom, thy doom or mine, pursuing thee,
Rending our lives asunder, threatens us.
Natheless I find nor will nor force to flee!

XI.

I MAY not flee, for I am wholly thine,
Already thine, and dare not dream of loss!
Swift-winged chance, the mystic albatross,
With plumes too mighty and with charms divine,
Hath borne me here a suppliant to thy shrine
In love's enchanted isle, and now doth cross
On pinions which the waves with foam emboss
Those dim irremeable wastes of brine.
I must abide; for chance hath flung me here:
Yea, though the summer hours so swiftly flown
Count but few weeks, they yet were all love's own:
Love reckons not by time; his dateless sphere
Circles in rest for ever round God's throne—
Eternity 's irrevoluble year.

XII.

HUSHED is the music; all those crowds are gone.
Flown are the passing strangers, whose dark eyes
Were bent my soul of souls to scrutinise,
Darting their wistful flame from foreheads wan.
Moonlight with lamplight blending slants upon
The tower that rears yon angel to the skies,
Where the grey miracle of Venice lies
Bare to the stars 'neath heaven's pavilion.
I only wake. I at this hour, when morn
Whitens the first faint pallor of the north,
Walk amid ghosts, and restless wander forth,
Pacing the sombre verge of waves forlorn.
These wait for day, disquieted. I wait,
And want thee, and repine, and weep my fate.

XIII.

RESTLESS I wander through these windy ways
And water-paths, where Auster swells the tide
Surging from Adria's sand-banks o'er the wide
Salt lakes low-lying and Venetian maze
Of marble basements. Like a ghost at gaze
Hurrying I thread the labyrinth hungry-eyed,
Seeking the one to whom my heart's voice cried
Through dim-remembered antenatal days.
Week-long I watch and wander; find not thee:
Nay, though one spoken word might bring thee near,
My lips are mute. Surely 'twas shown to me,
How without speech, some while, like morning clear,
Thy swift bright eyes unsummoned o'er the sea,
Should dawn, and mine make answer: I am here.

XIV.

NIGHT, saith the proverb in thy speech, my star!
Night is the mother of thoughts infinite.
Now lovers lone, drowned in the deep midnight,
Their treasury doors of countless thoughts unbar.
Yea, those who love, twined from the loved one, are
Vexed with a thousand shades of vain delight;
A thousand wakeful dreams with winnowing flight
Wave from their restless pillow sleep afar.
O star, my star! many as stars above thee,
Numberless are the thoughts wherewith I love thee!
From eve to dawn, waking, I toss and languish:
For thee, for thee, I find no snatch of slumber:
The very moonbeams on my bed in anguish
Wail and lament so that I find no slumber!

XV.

THOU wilt not always have thy seventeen years :
Thou wilt not always have those hues so fair :
Thou wilt not always have that golden hair :
Thou wilt not always have a man to love thee !
Time splits the marble walls with strength of years :
Time makes a lover's heart revive from pain :
Time cleaves the mountain-flank with constant strain :
With time I'll force thy heart of stone, and love thee !
O heart of stone, and soul of cruelty !
How many sighs hast thou drawn forth from me !
My heart burns upward like a firebrand when
I hear the folk around me speak of thee :
My heart burns up and flames within me then,
Hearing thy name upon the lips of men !

XVI.

DIDST thou but know, star of my soul's unrest,
What pains I suffered for thy sake, my own,
When thou wert warmly housed, and I alone,
I, wretched I, the cold, hard pavement pressed!
The rain was like rose-water to my breast;
The lightnings signs of love in mercy shown;
The storm a shower of sweets around me thrown;
While I beneath thy window found no rest!
While I beneath thy window made my bed,
Thou wert asleep, and with the spirit's eyes
I saw thee slumbering in the gates of dreams,
And seemed to see beneath the calm moonbeams
Thy pure white bosom all uncoverèd,
Thou loveliest angel flown from paradise!

XVII.

POETS and lovers, when the world was young,
Saw from still waves, from solitary flowers,
And far blue mountain-tops in tranquil hours,
Fair human forms emergent. Daphne clung
Close to the whispering laurel; Naiads flung
White arms from troubled fountains; rainbow showers
Drew Iris down the clouds; and windy bowers
With midnight cries of Faun and Satyr rung.
These dreams are flown: we have outworn romance
And mythic fable. Yet thy wonderland,
Thy Venice, from her blossom-like expanse
Of sea and sky commingling sends forth Thee,
To greet the soul that seeks her, and to stand
Fit incarnation of her deity.

XVIII.

YEA, 'twas for Thee we waited. Thou didst lean
Forth from inanimate loveliness, a soul
Completing and interpreting the whole
Of that which Venice and her people mean.
For me no longer like a painted scene
Or undecipherable antique scroll,
Rise palace-fronts around and waters roll,
Idle imagination's void demesne.
Spirit in thee meets spirit. That last bliss
We long for, when we gaze with ardent eyes,
Striving the world's delight to humanise;
Hands that will clasp our hands, lips that might kiss,
A heart that with our heart can sympathise;
I find in thee: but, ah, need more than this!

XIX.

O HEART, that it were possible to stay
On that first ledge of feeling, when the eyes,
Inebriate with milk of paradise,
Swim in the splendour of love's orient day;
Nor seek from beauty more than right to pay
The adoration of the soul, and rise
Strengthened by worship to eternalize,
Through art, her message ere she meet decay!
Man is too covetous: the poet's dream,
The painter's vision, voice of seraphim
Rising like altar-flame into the sky
Of music, these, though fair, content not him;
For he must drink of passion's fiery stream,
Nor knows if Love will find him ere he die.

XX.

THOU art so frank, so musical; thy smile
And speech responsive to the negligent
Lilt of thy limbs; thy laughter rippling sent
Like waves in summer round a windless isle;
That I dare half believe no purposed wile,
Dark scheme or greed for gain or discontent,
Lurk in thy breast, but fair thoughts innocent,
Unbargained love and friendship void of guile.
Dare I believe this? Dare I dream that thou,
The dawn-star of this Maya-city spread
A foam-film on the waters, 'neath that brow
Alive with latent lightnings, and the head
Medusa-like where smouldering passions glow,
Hidest no mystery, no deep shame, no dread?

XXI.

WHAT force compels my soul in Thee to find
The out-flood of her pent-up harmonies?
Why wakest thou the notes she pined to seize,
Locked in the lonely caverns of her mind?
What is there in thee that thou canst unbind
The sealèd fount of sacred memories,
Stirring dim musical remembrances
Of life in God ere earth's life made me blind?
Is it the rhythm of thy strength at rest,
Or rhythm of thy limbs so lightly swung,
Or of the heart atremble in thy breast,
Or of swift words that dance upon thy tongue?
Nay, these were well: yet 't was upon thine eyes
Gazing, my soul remembered Paradise.

XXII.

GIVE me thyself! It were as well to cry:
Give me the splendour of this night of June!
Give me yon star upon the swart lagoon
Trembling in unapproached serenity!
Our gondola that four swift oarsmen ply,
Shoots from the darkening Lido's sandy dune,
Splits with her steel the mirrors of the moon,
Shivers the star-beams that before us fly.
Give me thyself! This prayer is even a knell,
Warning me back to mine own impotence.
Self gives not self; and souls sequestered dwell
In the dark fortalice of thought and sense,
Where, though life's prisoners call from cell to cell,
Each pines alone and may not issue thence.

XXIII.

'TWERE prudence, therefore, to delude desire
With possible fruition; from afar
To watch smooth waters silvered by the star,
And the moon's mirrored loveliness admire.
'Twere prudence, ere flame fell, to crush that pyre
The thought of thee built in my soul, and bar
Her door against thy battail carrying war
Into the conquered town with sword and fire.
For yon stars errant of the homeless sky
None wail but children, yet unlearned to know
The laws that circumscribe humanity:
But to man's burning heart what power shall show
This common prudence? Human 't is to cry
For stars that like our soul's star throb and glow.

XXIV.

ART thou love-worthy? Shall a wretch set free
By those thy succourable fervid eyes,
Which with his long life-torment sympathise,
Crying: We comprehend thy pain and thee!—
Shall such a wretch weigh if thou worthy be,
Nor welcome love, though even in reckless wise
Love wing his wavering way through stormy skies,
Shrouded in doubt and instability?
Not I! No more I seek than what thou bringest;
And all thou askest, thou shalt have from me.
Give me thyself! Nay, if to gold thou clingest,
Gold in abundance I will shower on thee!
Thine eyes my hope are. It were heaven to gain
Communion with thee, even in the clasp of pain!

XXV.

SPARE me not thou! I would not have thee hide
The furnace of that fierce imperious gaze,
Nor pray thee for love's sake to veil the rays
Streaming from thy white soul, thou deified
Dream of lust intellectual, carnal pride!
What though I swoon on the world's stony ways
Desiring thee, though 'wildered in thy maze
Of loveliness I roam unsatisfied:
Though thou shouldst be for me incarnate hell,
Damnation palpable, a living flame,
Grave of mine honour, murderer of my name;
Nay, though thy love be thirst insatiable,
Want unassuaged and passion without aim;
Thine am I, thine, thou irresistible!

XXVI.

WAS it for naught then that my feet were set
Upon that upward and disconsolate way,
Which scales through darkness and the heart's dismay
From earth to heaven's star-cinctured parapet,
Where stationed on cold thrones the wise forget
Joy and the passionate gust of winds at play
Fluttering youth's roses in the disarray
Of petulant will untaught, untutored yet;
If now, even now, when manhood's soberer blood
Through steadier veins should drive a tardier flood,
Now when life's race toward noon is well-nigh run,
Keen gust of joy fraught with a fiery zest
On vexed anticipation's torturing quest
Hounds my tired soul lashed with love's malison?

XXVII.

REBUKE me not! I have nor wish nor skill
To alter one hair's breadth in all this house
Of Love, rising with domes so luminous
And air-built galleries on life's topmost hill!
Only I know that fate, chance, years that kill,
Change that transmutes, have aimed their darts at us;
Envying each lovely shrine and amorous
Reared on earth's soil by man's too passionate will.
Dread thou the moment when these glittering towers,
These adamantine walls and gates of gems,
Shall fade like forms of sun-forsaken cloud;
When dulled by imperceptible chill hours,
The golden spires of our Jerusalems
Shall melt to mist and vanish in night's shroud!

XXVIII.

I DREAMED we were together on blue waves
Sailing at eventide an unknown deep,
Where charmèd islands bathed in summer sleep,
Breathed shrill sea-music from their agate caves:
Love, the immortal youth of sixteen years,
With wings upon his shoulders and a star
Trembling above those eyes that pierce so far
Beyond the future of man's hopes and fears,
Steered us with singing: but I might not heed;
For with a dread my gaze was fixed on high,
Where burned the broad red sail against the sky,
And on the sail the semblance of a steed,
White as sea-foam and winged, which snorting bore
A dead man o'er blue waves for evermore.

XXIX.

MYSTERIOUS Night! Spread wide thy silvery plume!
Soft as swan's down, brood o'er the sapphirine
Breadth of still shadowy waters dark as wine;
Smooth out the liquid heavens that stars illume!
Come with fresh airs breathing the faint perfume
Of deep-walled gardens, groves of whispering pine;
Scatter cool dews, waft pure sea-scent of brine;
In sweet repose man's pain, man's love resume!
Deep-bosomed Night! Not here where down the marge
Marble with palaces those lamps of earth
Tremble on trembling blackness; nay, far hence,
There on the lake where space is lone and large,
And man's life lost in broad indifference,
Lift thou the soul to spheres that gave her birth!

xxx.

IMPASSIONED Night! Queen of our heart's unrest!
The slow dark waters journeying toward the sea
Plash with a soft low moaning melody
Like the half-heard sad music of man's breast.
O conscious Night! What murmurings unexpressed
Throb through the pulse of thy tranquillity!
We are alone with love and death and thee,
Silent, forlorn, disconsolate, oppressed.
The dusky waves stream on; the ruffling barque
With sails outspread that scarcely feel the breeze,
Glides on her passage through the glimmering dark:
These yearn for sleep in calm unfathomed seas;
She longs for anchorage; while heaven's huge arc
Swarms with tired travelling stars that find no ease.

XXXI.

THROUGHOUT the close inextricable coil
Of man's life-tissues—appetite, thought, will,
Sense, conscience, instinct, choice of good or ill—
There floats a fine elixir, subtlest oil,
Liquidest ether: substance is but foil
To this pure quintessence of powers that fill
The horn of life's abundance, and distil
Spirit through nerves that vibrate, thews that toil.
This, only this, forms man's last uttermost force;
And this finds no assuagement for the thirst
Enormous laid on being, till the whole
Inextricable coil, the sum of soul,
In every filament be satiate first;
Then self drains joy at life's transcendent source.

XXXII.

HOW shall the soul on that last ledge of being,
That thin fine tongue, keen quivering promontory
Thrust into utmost seas of gloom or glory
Beyond the extremest verge of mortal seeing—
How sever true from false before her fleeing,
Summon and satisfy those feudatory
Powers which reiterate their wrangling story,
How drink at length the bliss of their agreeing?
Fate weaves our arras-web: some selves are woven
For clear melodious issues, calm solutions,
Real or ideal, twin sides of joy's gold medal;
Others, too crossly spun, too deeply cloven,
In conflict clasp unharmonized illusions,
Grope with dumb hands on keys, numbed feet on pedal.

XXXIII.

IS love that last supremest consummation,
That final concord where all powers agree,
Commingling thought with sense, setting self free,
Soothing the tyrant will with joy's oblation?
No need to pause for doubt or consultation;
Those wrangling partners in man's empery,
Brief parley made, proclaim their jubilee:
Love, only love fulfils life's aspiration!
True: but how rare, how mystical a jewel
Must that love be which mid the vexed confusion
Of sense, will, reason, shields the soul from peril!
How sinister, how ruinously cruel,
The fate of him who blinded by illusion
O'erlooks one flaw in love's enchanted beryl!

XXXIV.

HOW often have I now outwatched the night
Alone in this grey chamber toward the sea
Turning its deep-arcaded balcony!
Round yonder sharp acanthus-leaves the light
Comes stealing, red at first, then golden bright;
Till when the day-god in his strength and glee
Springs from the orient flood victoriously,
Each cusp is tipped and tongued with quivering white.
The islands that were blots of purple bloom,
Now tremble in soft liquid luminous haze,
Uplifted from the sea-floor to the skies;
And dim discerned erewhile through roseate gloom,
A score of sails now stud the waterways,
Ruffling like swans afloat from paradise.

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IT came at length, our meeting. Her white dress,
Those summer robes she then so lightly wore,
Were changed for winter's livery, and the shore
Of Lido where she stood, now 'neath the stress
Of rude Borrin with wavelets numberless
Moaned to grey lands and cloud-capped mountains hoar.
Her cheeks were bronzed with sunshine; yet she bore
Light in her eyes from heaven's deep wilderness,
Blue lustre linking her to skies and seas,
Clear elemental splendour. Grave and few,
Meant for bystanders, were our words; but these
Bound soul with soul; from brow to forehead flew
Prayer and compliance. Were those effluences,
So strongly felt, felt only by us two?

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The sea-floor spread beneath that windless blue:
The moon ascendant like a live coal through
Infinite depths of ocean, steals on them.
From burning rosè to gold, from gold to true
Silver she soars with lifted diadem,
Scaling the skies, and with her lustrous hem
Sweeping the lesser lamps of night from view.
All the pure ardent stars that were so white,
Sink into space; she brooks no rival near:
The seas her mirror, and the heavens her sphere.
Only she dares not quench that breathing light
Which in this dark room shines and outshines her,
Stella, sole empress o'er the queen of night.

XXXVII.

SILVERY mosquito-curtains draped the bed:
A lamp stood on the table; but its light
Startled no whit the drowsy wings of night,
Nor had the mystery of darkness fled.
She slumbered not: flawless from foot to head;
Fair ivory body clothed in fairest white;
No bar between her beauty and my sight:
Silence and storm-throes on our souls were shed.
Storm in the flakes of refluent hair that fret
Those brows imperious; in the smouldering fire
Of clear blue eyes love's tear-dews never wet;
Scorn frozen on firm lips, and petulant ire
Ready to leap from that marmoreal breast.
How awful was this motionless unrest!

XXXVIII.

AND then she rose; and rising, then she knelt;
And then she paced the floor with passionate tread;
And then she sank with that imperial head
Bowed on bare knees: her broad arms made a belt
To clasp them; dark rebellious hair was shed
In tempest o'er fixed ardent eyes which dwelt,
Searching my heart's heart; yea, my manhood felt
From that tense huddled form intensest dread.
Nerves quaked; veins curdled; thin compulsive flame
Thrilled through her crouching flesh to my couched soul
Expectant; lingering minutes winged with blame
Swept over us with voiceless thunder-roll,
While the vast silence of the midnight stole,
Merging our sin, a shuddering sea of shame!

XXXIX.

SHE was a woman; therefore was she one,
Worshipping whom a man of woman born
Shrinks like a guilty thing surprised by morn
From thoughts of self and sin's dominion.
I clasped her in my arms; yet might not shun
The awful oath of that allegiance sworn
To Beauty, when the soul was less forlorn
Circling with gods round heaven's unfaltering sun.
I drank her lips; as thirsty flowers drink rain,
Kisses I drank sweeter than honey-dews;
Yet though their arrowy perfume smote my brain,
Love lurked not there, whose breath lifts earth to heaven;
Love, for whose sake man's frailties are forgiven,
Love cried: Less than Love's best thou shalt refuse!

XL.

SIDE unto side, we watched the ascendant day:
But naught of faith, nothing of hope we spake:
Breezes of morning thrilled the salt sea-lake;
While my will wavered yet twixt yea and nay.
Suddenly, passion's red flower faded away;
Maya some little time forebore to shake
Her painted lure, while the dull frozen ache
Of disappointment turned my life's light grey.
Scorn spake, self-scorn aping satiety:
"There neither is, nor can there ever be,
'Twixt that white body and thy weak heart's desire,
Communion! Touch, taste, handle! fierce self-blame
Shall feed on thee, fervid with venomed fire.
For gold she sells herself. Thine is the shame!"

XLI.

"SHAME and Desire, twin brethren, are the brood
Of thoughts diseased, which sound thoughts over-
reach;
Self-gendering and self-slaughtering, each by each
Slain and impregnated; incestuous blood,
Seed fratricidal. These find sweetest food
In brains of fools, whose blood stale customs bleach;
Who drug remorse with paradox, and preach
Confusion, prating of vice gilt with good.
Look on the girl there, thou thrice-cozened fool—
Fooled by desire, by shame, by thought's disease!
Let her greed send thy paltering soul to school!
Thought, shame, desire, she hath not. Sense and will
On what she grasps, without misgiving seize.
Herself she yields, throat, passion, purse to fill."

XLII.

WINGED arrows from the armoury of scorn
Flew home, and stung my spirit; my heart, unquelled,
With indignation those fierce gibes repelled;
And like the nightingale against a thorn
Leaning her wounded breast from eve till morn,
Made music out of misery, which held
The ear of grief attentive, and refelled
Despair with arguments from anguish torn.
"Taunt me no taunts! Have I not felt and seen
That beauty like to this which I let shine
Undimmed in lily-white marmoreal sheen,
Nor dared to mar with lustre less divine,
Must, shall be proved love-worthy, even though we,
Seeker and sought, souls most unworthy be?"

XLIII.

AH might it be that thou, who like the Dawn,
Or Nereid rising from thine own blue sea,
In supple strength and fearless nudity,
With calm wide eyes of azure unwithdrawn,
Bared thy white limbs, and let thy beauty dawn
In moonbeams whiter than the moon for me;
Thou wild as Adria's waves that cradled thee,
Swift as a sleuth-hound, slender as a fawn;—
Ah might it be that thou, even thou, couldst give
What the soul yearns for; not this passionate feast
Which makes the satiate man go forth a beast!
I crave no life-gift; let the guerdon be
Than thought more frail, than time more fugitive,
So but we blend one moment, thou with me!

XLIV.

DREAMER! I cast beyond the moon, and crave
Impossibility. These longings are
Mere madness, like to theirs who clasp a star,
Or pluck the North-lights on their plumes to wave.
Desire so sublimate digs her own grave:
Substance for shadow bartering, peace for war,
We seek we know not what; yet, seeking, mar
Such goods as God to lowlier lovers gave.
Delight still flies before us: still we groan
Mid dreams emergent from our own heart's gloom;
Which, bright as dawn by traitorous fancy shown,
Turn, when we wake and face our hopeless doom,
To fiends of midnight vengeance, and the tomb
Gapes to engulf us wrecked and overthrown.

XLV.

TAKE it, oh take it, take thy gold! The shame
Shall rest with me, the bitter barren bliss
Of dreaming on a joy so brief as this.
Thou hast no suffering, and, I think, no blame.
Abide for me the everlasting flame,
The worm that dies not, and the snakes that hiss
Round souls that seek impossibilities,
Lost in their lake of longing without aim.
Is there no spell then to assuage this smart?
None; for we truly know not what we crave.
Knowing, we might appease the clamorous heart:
But lust contents it not; and storms that rave
O'er the soul's seas, are stilled by no fine art.
Ah God, will peace be found even in the grave?

XLVIII.

I DO remember while I muse upon
The peevish impotence of my mistrust,
Puling at love because forsooth love must
Build divers shrines for man's devotion;
I do remember how I strove with one,
The rapier of whose keener thought was thrust
Down to the soul's core, severing love from lust
With touch more fine and firmer vision.
This truth he spake, "Toward undiscovered things
Thou shalt not soar on those dark dragon wings
Fledged by gaunt appetite from glut of pain!
The soul's adventure frank and free as air
Whereof thou pratest, oh, my friend, beware,
'Tis but a blind love-blasting hurricane!"

XLIX.

Is there no way by tyrannous strength of will
To shape life's course across the trackless deep,
Choosing our own star from the stars that sweep
Heaven's concave? Or must man one fate fulfil
By patient tendance on the pole-star still,
The sole star all must serve who fain would keep
Safe steerage through the waves that round them leap,
The storms that scatter and the rocks that kill?
I have not lived my own philosophy!
How could I live it? for the joy I sought
Was intermixed with so much subtlest ill,
That when I grasped that cup, the good in me
Stood forth in scorn, and I, in trammels caught
Of my own strength, was forced the wine to spill.

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Sink into space; she brooks no rival near:
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Of clear blue eyes love's tear-dews never wet;
Scorn frozen on firm lips, and petulant ire
Ready to leap from that marmoreal breast.
How awful was this motionless unrest!

XLVIII.

I DO remember while I muse upon
The peevish impotence of my mistrust,
Puling at love because forsooth love must
Build divers shrines for man's devotion;
I do remember how I strove with one,
The rapier of whose keener thought was thrust
Down to the soul's core, severing love from lust
With touch more fine and firmer vision.
This truth he spake, "Toward undiscovered things
Thou shalt not soar on those dark dragon wings
Fledged by gaunt appetite from glut of pain!
The soul's adventure frank and free as air
Whereof thou pratest, oh, my friend, beware,
'Tis but a blind love-blasting hurricane!"

XXXIX.

SHE was a woman; therefore was she one,
Worshipping whom a man of woman born
Shrinks like a guilty thing surprised by morn
From thoughts of self and sin's dominion.
I clasped her in my arms; yet might not shun
The awful oath of that allegiance sworn
To Beauty, when the soul was less forlorn
Circling with gods round heaven's unfaltering sun.
I drank her lips; as thirsty flowers drink rain,
Kisses I drank sweeter than honey-dews;
Yet though their arrowy perfume smote my brain,
Love lurked not there, whose breath lifts earth to heaven;
Love, for whose sake man's frailties are forgiven,
Love cried: Less than Love's best thou shalt refuse!

XL.

SIDE unto side, we watched the ascendant day:
But naught of faith, nothing of hope we spake:
Breezes of morning thrilled the salt sea-lake;
While my will wavered yet twixt yea and nay.
Suddenly, passion's red flower faded away;
Maya some little time forebore to shake
Her painted lure, while the dull frozen ache
Of disappointment turned my life's light grey.
Scorn spake, self-scorn aping satiety:
"There neither is, nor can there ever be,
'Twixt that white body and thy weak heart's desire,
Communion! Touch, taste, handle! fierce self-blame
Shall feed on thee, fervid with venomed fire.
For gold she sells herself. Thine is the shame!"

XLI.

"SHAME and Desire, twin brethren, are the brood
Of thoughts diseased, which sound thoughts over-
reach;
Self-gendering and self-slaughtering, each by each
Slain and impregnated; incestuous blood,
Seed fratricidal. These find sweetest food
In brains of fools, whose blood stale customs bleach;
Who drug remorse with paradox, and preach
Confusion, prating of vice gilt with good.
Look on the girl there, thou thrice-cozened fool—
Fooled by desire, by shame, by thought's disease!
Let her greed send thy paltering soul to school!
Thought, shame, desire, she hath not. Sense and will
On what she grasps, without misgiving seize.
Herself she yields, throat, passion, purse to fill."

LII.

THEY write me, Stella, write me thou art mad!
Strange truth to say, this comforts me somewhat.
Knowing thee severed from life's common lot,
I bow to Him who made thee, yea am glad.
In lieu of that fierce calenture I had
Transmitted from thine eyes, my heart so hot
Is cooled with tenderness; I fear thee not,
Nor loathe, nor long. Nay, though my soul is sad,
Sad for thee, my soul's sister, loveliest one
That e'er these shameful sorrowing eyes shall shun,
Yet art thou sacred now, assoiled of sin:
And I can shed kind tears, nor curse our fate;
I understand thee now, and weeping win
Solace: we both have fallen, but God is great.

XLIII.

AH might it be that thou, who like the Dawn,
Or Nereid rising from thine own blue sea,
In supple strength and fearless nudity,
With calm wide eyes of azure unwithdrawn,
Bared thy white limbs, and let thy beauty dawn
In moonbeams whiter than the moon for me;
Thou wild as Adria's waves that cradled thee,
Swift as a sleuth-hound, slender as a fawn;—
Ah might it be that thou, even thou, couldst give
What the soul yearns for; not this passionate feast
Which makes the satiate man go forth a beast!
I crave no life-gift; let the guerdon be
Than thought more frail, than time more fugitive,
So but we blend one moment, thou with me!

XXXIV.

HOW often have I now outwatched the night
Alone in this grey chamber toward the sea
Turning its deep-arcaded balcony!
Round yonder sharp acanthus-leaves the light
Comes stealing, red at first, then golden bright;
Till when the day-god in his strength and glee
Springs from the orient flood victoriously,
Each cusp is tipped and tongued with quivering white.
The islands that were blots of purple bloom,
Now tremble in soft liquid luminous haze,
Uplifted from the sea-floor to the skies;
And dim discerned erewhile through roseate gloom,
A score of sails now stud the waterways,
Ruffling like swans afloat from paradise.

XXXV.

IT came at length, our meeting. Her white dress,
Those summer robes she then so lightly wore,
Were changed for winter's livery, and the shore
Of Lido where she stood, now 'neath the stress
Of rude Borrin with wavelets numberless
Moaned to grey lands and cloud-capped mountains hoar.
Her cheeks were bronzed with sunshine; yet she bore
Light in her eyes from heaven's deep wilderness,
Blue lustre linking her to skies and seas,
Clear elemental splendour. Grave and few,
Meant for bystanders, were our words; but these
Bound soul with soul; from brow to forehead flew
Prayer and compliance. Were those effluences,
So strongly felt, felt only by us two?

XXXVI.

THE heavens are one dusk sapphire; one dark gem
The sea-floor spread beneath that windless blue:
The moon ascendant like a live coal through
Infinite depths of ocean, steals on them.
From burning rosè to gold, from gold to true
Silver she soars with lifted diadem,
Scaling the skies, and with her lustrous hem
Sweeping the lesser lamps of night from view.
All the pure ardent stars that were so white,
Sink into space; she brooks no rival near:
The seas her mirror, and the heavens her sphere.
Only she dares not quench that breathing light
Which in this dark room shines and outshines her,
Stella, sole empress o'er the queen of night.

XXXVII.

SILVERY mosquito-curtains draped the bed:
A lamp stood on the table; but its light
Startled no whit the drowsy wings of night,
Nor had the mystery of darkness fled.
She slumbered not: flawless from foot to head;
Fair ivory body clothed in fairest white;
No bar between her beauty and my sight:
Silence and storm-throes on our souls were shed.
Storm in the flakes of refluent hair that fret
Those brows imperious; in the smouldering fire
Of clear blue eyes love's tear-dews never wet;
Scorn frozen on firm lips, and petulant ire
Ready to leap from that marmoreal breast.
How awful was this motionless unrest!

XXVIII.

I DREAMED we were together on blue waves
Sailing at eventide an unknown deep,
Where charmèd islands bathed in summer sleep,
Breathed shrill sea-music from their agate caves:
Love, the immortal youth of sixteen years,
With wings upon his shoulders and a star
Trembling above those eyes that pierce so far
Beyond the future of man's hopes and fears,
Steered us with singing: but I might not heed;
For with a dread my gaze was fixed on high,
Where burned the broad red sail against the sky,
And on the sail the semblance of a steed,
White as sea-foam and winged, which snorting bore
A dead man o'er blue waves for evermore.

XXIX.

MYSTERIOUS Night! Spread wide thy silvery plume!
Soft as swan's down, brood o'er the sapphirine
Breadth of still shadowy waters dark as wine;
Smooth out the liquid heavens that stars illume!
Come with fresh airs breathing the faint perfume
Of deep-walled gardens, groves of whispering pine;
Scatter cool dews, waft pure sea-scent of brine;
In sweet repose man's pain, man's love resume!
Deep-bosomed Night! Not here where down the marge
Marble with palaces those lamps of earth
Tremble on trembling blackness; nay, far hence,
There on the lake where space is lone and large,
And man's life lost in broad indifference,
Lift thou the soul to spheres that gave her birth!

LX.

METHOUGHT in sleep, nay not in sleep, far more
In clear-eyed visions of the wakeful night,
Stella came aureoled with silvery light,
Standing at my bedside as heretofore
She stood, a breathing statue, marble-white,
With calm beseeching eyes, hands that implore,
And on her lips, from that celestial shore
Where our souls met, a message winged with might.
Ah, strange! Yet wherefore strange? For friend knows friend
Only through spirit-thrills that touch the mind
To act of divination: thus we lend
Each to the other potencies which bind
Twinned selves in quintessence, thoughts that portend
Those last best aptitudes the senses blind.

LXI.

POISED in mid air and gloom, on sails outspread,
Chimæra trembles. Whether our flight is flown;
Whether outsoaring this Cimmerian zone,
Where fear dwells and the soul with doubt is fed,
Deathward the wings that bore us shall be sped;
I know not. Reason upon my spirit's throne
Now waits, illumined by the rays that shone
Still from thine eyes and archangelic head.
This interstellar darkness, shed between
Clairvoyance and illusion, doubt-beset,
Sharpens the soul's sight. I have clearly seen,
Here on heaven's boundary line, hell's parapet,
That Thou within thine inmost heart's serene
Love-worthy art, and Love shall fold thee yet.

LXII.

HUSH, I have fallen; my feet are on firm ground;
Chimæra like the thunderstorm withdraws;
And I am left to sober natural laws,
A calm grey sky, a landscape cloud-embrowned.
How looks the plain, the footing I have found?
Stern, but not desolate; and through the flaws
Of tempest shines one star, whose lustre draws
My tortured soul into her peace profound.
Praise, praise to God! Surely 'twas God who willed
This whirlwind where my life was well-nigh lost.
I feel Him; with heaven's hope my heart is filled.
Where God is, I am, and Thou art. The cost
Shall not be counted, when at length in Him
Both blend, as blend we must, spirit and limb.

LXIII.

WHO reads may wonder that so crude a fact—
Mere love 'twixt man and maid, lawless, unwed—
Should by sheer force of scrupulous thought be led
To such fine issues. 'Twas a trivial act.
From the bare natural feast of sense and tact
Springs healthy flesh new-born, exhilarated:
Why should the heart then starve? Why prowl, unfed,
Lion-like, through waste wild, cave, cataract?
Verily, there's the problem. Yet should he
Have found, or dreamed to find in her the goal,
Whither he voyaged with a hungering soul;
But finding it, have found therewith that she
Loved not as he loved—think you then his whole
Life-wisdom saved him from blank misery?

LXIV.

THIS man, whose impotence shows manifest
In the cold light of life's philosophy,
From love sought some clear joy, fairer, more free,
More exquisite, than earthly love possessed.
Tired of seclusion, stirred by vague unrest,
His spirit's sails in rash precipitancy
Took flight across the wide and treacherous sea
Of Beauty, winged for a false adventurous quest.
Beauty seduced him. There are souls who pay
Such vows to Aphrodite that she seems
Consolidate with Goodness pure as day,
And Truth transcending Fancy's loftiest dreams:
Who saith that Loveliness can be mere clay,
Against their heart's best hope, their faith blasphemes.

LXV.

ARE these then lost in everlasting night?
Is there no substance in that ancient lore
Which taught the expectant spirit how to soar
Heavenward on plumes uplift by Beauty's might?
To form the rays of that celestial light
Which from the throne of thrones for evermore
Streams on the hosts of angels that adore,
Goodness and Truth with Loveliness unite.
Earth sunders what the eternal will made one:
Truth veils the splendour that would sear our eyes:
Goodness conceals her charms in coarse homespun:
Beauty puts on that sensual disguise,
Which when men fain would clasp her, bids him shun
Gross Circe-spells that blind and brutalize.

LXVI.

STILL are the sisters soldered by a bond
Which even on earth is holy. Therefore we
Who follow love with vain temerity,
Deeming that wanton lord some vagabond,
Who with light heart will laughingly abscond,
Leaving his debts unpaid, careless and free,
Find to our cost that by some stern decree
Duty still rules us with inflexible wand.
Loveliness stirs the soul's most sacred thirst
For unattainable good transcending sense;
And loyalty, which slumbered when the first
Whirlwind of passion blurred truth's excellence,
Resumes her sway o'er tempers gently nursed.
From love true men still crave life-permanence.

LXVII.

BEAUTIFUL wert thou! What was then thy gift
Of irresponsible beauty on our earth?
I found in thee no toy for trivial mirth;
Nor bred beneath thy radiance plumes to lift
The adventurous soul above this mundane drift
Of cares diurnal. When I test the worth
Of that thy flawless diamond, from the birth
Of passion to its death, I still must sift
Love's problem thus:—Love, be it high or low,
Is no light-winged slight indifferent thing,
But a close bond wedding two selves in one;
However disparate those selves may grow
Toward diverse issues. Beauty thus doth bring
Man back through love to law no life may shun.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

WINTER NIGHTS IN THE HIGH ALPS.

I.

NOTES of a mute, not melancholy world,
A world of snows and darkness and moon-sheen,
Of still crystalline air and stars serene,
And stationary pines in slumber furled:
Notes of the sober night, when drift is whirled
By tireless winds over the solemn scene,
When the lake-pavement groans, and mists between
The shadowy mountain tops are coldly curled:
Notes of a meditative man who walks
Those white fields and that ice-floor all alone,
Yet draws warm life from winter's frozen wells:
Notes of a soul that most divinely talks
Unto herself in silence, and hath known
The God that in the mystic moon-world dwells.

II.

I SEND them to you, friends, whose feet are far,
Moving upon a loved and populous land
In sweet society and mutual band
Of fellowship, star linked to breathing star!
Fain would I sometimes be where pictures are,
And music, and the clasp of hand to hand;
Where men I love with loveliest women stand,
And theatres their wonder-world unbar;
Where London's eddying ocean on its surge
Tosses the thunder of souls armed for strife,
And streets, aflame all night, with forceful urge
Of multitudes in conflict quicken life;
Where chaff from wheat of hearts keen passions purge,
And each tense hour with throes of fate is rife.

III.

WITH you I may not dwell. Yet man is great;
And the mind triumphs over place and time:
I therefore, doomed to weave my lonely rhyme,
Here 'mid these pines, these moon-scenes desolate,
Have found therein a joy that mocks at fate;
And stationed on a specular mount sublime,
Have scanned yon fields low-lying, whence I climb
To commune with the stars inviolate.
The sempiternal stars, the flawless snows,
The crystal gems fashioned by art of frost,
The thin pure wind that whence it listeth blows,
The solitude whereon the soul is tossed
In contemplation of the world's huge woes;
These things suffice. Life's labour is not lost.

IV.

FRIENDS have I found here too: this peasant folk,
Comradely, frank, athletic; men who draw
Their lineage from a race that never saw
Fear on the field, but with firm sinewy stroke
Those knightly ranks, Burgundian, Austrian, broke,
And bade the Italian tyrant far withdraw;
These vales, these hills have known no lord but law
Since Freedom for this people first awoke.
Their joys austere, their frugal style be mine;
Low houses builded of the rude rough stone,
Raftered and panelled with smooth native pine;
Here let me rest heart-whole, nor rest alone;
High thoughts be my companions; words divine
Of poets; these are still the spirit's own.

FOR A PICTURE.

A DREAM of deep green England came to me,
Musing 'mid snows here by the slumberous stove :—
Warm summer evening faded o'er a grove
Massed into leafy darkness, tree by tree,
From saffron sky down to short turf, where he
Who filled the foreground, like a beardless god,
In coarse brown working clothes divinely trod,
Shouldering his joiner's tools, stately and free.
Like a young god he moved. And each strong limb,
Unconscious of its strength, played tranquilly.
The day's work dealt, this hour for love and home,
This cool dark dewy hour, his own, had come,
This hour for greetings at the gate, when she
Who trembled 'neath his clasp, should cling to him.

THE AVERAGE MAN.

WHO is my chosen hero? I have none.
This young man is enough for me: brave, chaste,
Faithful to duty, by no vice debased,
Lord of himself, yet serving every one;
Fair, with frank eyes, and jocund as the sun;
Smiling from full glad lips; so amply graced
With natural persuasion, pure from waist
To feet and shoulder, that no man doth shun,
Nor woman neither, his compulsive charm.
These great good gifts he ne'er hath used for harm.
From his stout limbs, true heart, strong-fibred brain,
Sweetness flows into life, like sweet fresh air
From mountains blown over a bed of pain.
I seek naught human loftier, naught more rare.

ADOLESCENTI.

TOO blessèd thou, couldst thou self-conscious be
Of thine own blessedness! couldst thou but live
Contented with those gifts the minutes give;
Thy bare existence being felicity!
No burden of the world's pain weighs on thee:
Thou ne'er hast felt fate's worst imperative:
Those weariest words Forget, Forgo, Forgive,
Are found not yet in thy philosophy.
Thrice blessèd thou! Though one had eminent wealth,
Fame, knowledge, wisdom, mastery of his art;
Yet were he naught matched with thine ignorance,
Thy poverty, thine insignificance!
To thee, being young, God giveth the better part;
Unworn, unvexed, unwearied, thou hast health!

A PROBLEM OF THE NIGHT.

FULL well we know that each star is a sun,
Circled with congregated worlds that move
In rhythmic choirs around one heart of love
Vibrating flames which through their orbits run.
Faith too hath held that of these worlds each one
Pulses with life and life-pangs like our own;
For some are fledglings, some to full age grown,
Some over-worn, their labours told and done.
These thoughts perplex me not. Far more I muse,
On winter nights, when the wide heavens lie bare,
Why is it that one region shines so fair
With fabled constellations, fiery spears,
Orbs within orbs, which cross and interfuse,
While yon black gulf yawns well-nigh void of spheres?

THREE SISTERS.

Reason, Will, the Heart.

"GIVE *me* the dagger! Let *me* deal death's blow!"
Cried Reason in her scorn, when craven Will,
Quailing before some apprehended ill,
Had let my guilty Heart unmurdered go.
Phantom-like o'er smooth wreaths of winter snow,
Where passion slept her last sleep in the chill
Of frozen hope, these twain swept up the hill,
And found their sister sunk in tearless woe.
My Heart, when she beheld them, rose and knelt:
"Spare me not, dreadful sisters! Slay, but hear!
For your sakes I would suffer worse than death.
Yet, when you've slain me, say: Through her we *felt*."
Then, when those unrelenting ones were near,
She kissed their hands and yielded up her breath.

IN BLACK AND WHITE—WINTER ETCHINGS.

I.

The Chorister.

SNOW on the high-pitched minster roof and spire :
Snow on the boughs of leafless linden trees :
Snow on the silent streets and squares that freeze
Under night's wing down-drooping nigh and nigher.
Inside the church, within the shadowy choir,
Dim burn the lamps like lights on vaporous seas ;
Drowsed are the voices of droned litanies ;
Blurred as in dreams the face of priest and friar.
Cold hath numbed sense to slumber here ! But hark,
One swift soprano, soaring like a lark,
Startles the stillness ; throbs that soul of fire,
Beats around arch and aisle, floods echoing dark
With exquisite aspiration ; higher, higher,
Yearns in sharp anguish of untold desire !

II.

The Zither-Player.

THREE stealthy winter months of frost and storm
Have piled this mountain-pass from peak to peak
With trackless avalanche and snow-wreaths bleak,
Obliterating road-marks, blurring form.
One thing alone upon the waste is warm:
One low-roofed house, where struggling men may seek
Shelter, when whirled tornadoes round them shriek,
And the snow-fiends of wild December swarm.
In the pine-panelled room, beside the stove,
A crone sleeps crouching o'er her spinning-wheel,
An old man groans upon the bed above;
The while a youth, whose eyes through twilight rove
In search of something which the sad hours steal,
Draws from thrilled zither-strings the dirge of love.

III.

At Midnight.

FROM dreams I wake; dreams of warm summer night;
Deep night on stately cities; luminous seas,
Ruffled in rosy sunset with a breeze,
Breathing from unnamed mountains far from sight.
From dreams I wake; dream-lands where hope is bright,
And love the nursling of light melodies,
And joy a wingèd thing too swift to seize,
And mere existence an unmixed delight.
Then from my bed I rise: the frozen vale
Whitens before the window 'neath a cloud,
Snowing incessantly; winter death-pale
Heaps drift on drift, wraps shroud o'er sheeted shroud,
Round the gaunt forest-slopes that guard this gaol;
Where hopes decay, where dreams are disallowed.

IV.

The Jodeller.

LOW spreads the chamber-roof of red larch wood:
The deep wide walls with Cembra-plank and pine
Are timbered: ponderous volumes, line o'er line,
Rise from the floor in voiceless multitude.
One lamp dilutes the darkness. Here I brood
Mid clouds of blue tobacco-smoke that twine
Round the square stove of dull green serpentine,
Where Perseus towers, drenched in the Gorgon's blood.
Here through the slow still winter nights I muse,
Or write, or read, or dream of days long dead:
The soft smooth drifts all sounds outside confuse:
Only at one fixed hour a young man goes
With shrill blithe jodel homeward o'er the snows:
My heart leaps up; my soul is warmed and fed.

v.

A Waking Dream.

WALKING, I met upon this winter road,
In light malign, obscurity of stars,
My very self: his brows were seamed with scars,
His shoulders bent beneath sin's heavy load.
A lolling imp that weary pack bestrode,
Who glared and grinned behind close visor-bars;
He in his crookèd hand held splintered spars,
Waifs of wrecked hope, and plied them like a goad.
Tottering, blood-stained, over the slippery snow,
That double of my self in anguish crept,
Crawling I know not to what dreadful goal:
While the shrill puck-eared fiend kept gibbering low,
"Mine was the care to rouse you when you slept!
Dark loom the ways before us, slothful soul!"

VI.

The Todten-Volk.

THEY trod the snow, that frore battalion;
Yet not one foot-track on the snow was seen:
Cowled and in antique habit, 'neath the sheen
Of moon and stars, the dead folk journeyed on.
The shuddering seer that vision might not shun:
At the smooth brink of the storm-swept ravine,
Stationed with scarce firm standing-ground between
The dead folk and his death, he marked each one.
They came; the dead moved onward without sign;
No light was in their eye-balls; each dry face
Turned from his face that scanned; only the last
Gazed on him with strange sweetness in sad eyne:
That was his own true love: alive she passed,
To join next day death's frozen populace.

THE COMING OF SPRING.

WE wake one morning, and the frozen hush
That broods on field and forest winter-long,
Is broken by a brief and tremulous song
Poured from yon snow-girt pine-wood. 'Tis a thrush!
Again, yet once again, those joy-notes gush
O'er the white wilderness; whereby a throng
Of summer hopes are loosened, and the strong
Night melts in earliest Spring's auroral blush.
Soon streams will glide and murmur; here and there
Soft downy fledglings on the dry grey sod
Peep into light, dove-plumed anemones;
And meadow-grass grow green, and everywhere
The sward be starred with scented crocuses,
And in mild air earth feel her present god.

THE SOUL AND THE EAGLE.

IF Azraël, the Angel of the Lord,
Should float into thy chamber and should say,
"I am sent to cleave asunder spirit and clay!"
Waving therewith death's keen two-handed sword;
How wouldst thou take that sentence? Pain abhorred,
Loathly desire, chill day succeeding day,
Cast from thee; wouldst thou soar, winging thy way
To nothing or new lives in darkness stored?
To me there came a hunter yester-morn
Bearing an eagle he had caged, to sell:
I bought the bird, bade him fly forth; forlorn
With dull captivity, some moments' spell
He shivered, then spread wings, and upward borne
On blasts of exultation spurned our dell.

ON THE COWBERRY ALP.

I HAD a dream, daughter, a dream last night:
Ah me, that fancy thus should fool a man!
Do you remember where our spaniel ran
Yesterday through those larches summery-bright
With gentians and the tremulous delight
Of hurrying streamlets? We were cold and wan;
We saw the fair flowers, but we gazed upon
This wondrous world through shades of self-born night.
Sleep brought me flattering visions; for I paced
Those self-same lawns, that bubbling water-brim,
Like new-made Adam; and you walked as one
Awaked to life amid heaven's seraphim.
Will it be so when death comes? Pale, defaced,
Shall souls bloom forth and greet the eternal sun?

IN THE FIR WOOD.

GREY pines, companions of my solitude,
Which with the change of seasons cannot change,
Contracted to life's narrowing winter-range,
Cloistered within the aisles of this sad wood!
Teach me your wisdom, patriarchs! Ye have stood
Patient three hundred years, nor thought it strange,
Yourselves unstirred, to watch in farm and grange
Man's transitory race ten times renewed.
Ye murmur not: what though spring's wizard hands
Waft you no love-gifts; though nor orient sun
Nor sunset have ye gazed on; though the breeze
Thrills you with flattering music from far lands
You scarce dare dream of; though rills past you run,
Babbling way-farers, bound for venturous seas.

RESIGNATION.

I.

NEVER, oh never more shall I behold
A sunrise on the glacier :—stars of morn
Paling in primrose round the crystal horn;
Soft curves of crimson mellowing into gold
O'er sapphire chasm, and silvery snow-field cold;
Fire that o'er-floods the horizon; beacons borne
From wind-worn peak to storm-swept peak forlorn;
Clear hallelujahs through heaven's arches rolled.
Never, oh never more these feet shall feel
The firm elastic tissue of upland turf,
Or the crisp edge of the high rocks; or cling
Where the embattled cliffs beneath them reel
Through cloud-wreaths eddying like the Atlantic surf,
Far, far above the wheeling eagle's wing.

II.

THEN welcome, resignation! O ye powers,
That mould our mortal fate, patience I crave!
Let not this flesh become life's sentient grave
Through self-abandonment and loveless hours!
What is it that we men call rightly ours?
Joy, and high pulse of health? Strong arms that wave
Adventurous ensigns? Hearts inured to brave
Death on the perilous world's giddy watch-towers?
Not these; but souls that seek not to rebel;
Renunciation hand in hand with hope;
Faith that can cheer e'en exile's lonely glen;
Love that on little things is wont to dwell;
Thoughts unsubdued, fronting heaven's awful cope
And the unfathomable minds of men.

THE ENVOY TO A BOOK.

THE ENVOY TO A BOOK.

I.

FAREWELL, my comrade through those checkered years;
Ten years of storm and sunshine shared with thee!
Each of thy written words remains to be
Landmark of doubts outlived, abandoned fears.
I chose thee, as men choose the friend who cheers
Long months of outland wanderings. Thou for me
Hast been calm strength, fruitful society,
Comfort amid well-springs of wasteful tears.
It was no vulgar impulse, thirst for fame,
Ambition, greed of gold, quest after truth,
That prompted me to this my arduous aim;
But keen self-communing in the close of youth,
Thirst of the soul, choked with sloth's weeds within,
From work new calm, new wealth, new faith to win.

ON THE COWBERRY ALP.

I HAD a dream, daughter, a dream last night:
Ah me, that fancy thus should fool a man!
Do you remember where our spaniel ran
Yesterday through those larches summery-bright
With gentians and the tremulous delight
Of hurrying streamlets? We were cold and wan;
We saw the fair flowers, but we gazed upon
This wondrous world through shades of self-born night.
Sleep brought me flattering visions; for I paced
Those self-same lawns, that bubbling water-brim,
Like new-made Adam; and you walked as one
Awaked to life amid heaven's seraphim.
Will it be so when death comes? Pale, defaced,
Shall souls bloom forth and greet the eternal sun?

IN THE FIR WOOD.

GREY pines, companions of my solitude,
Which with the change of seasons cannot change,
Contracted to life's narrowing winter-range,
Cloistered within the aisles of this sad wood!
Teach me your wisdom, patriarchs! Ye have stood
Patient three hundred years, nor thought it strange,
Yourselves unstirred, to watch in farm and grange
Man's transitory race ten times renewed.
Ye murmur not: what though spring's wizard hands
Waft you no love-gifts; though nor orient sun
Nor sunset have ye gazed on; though the breeze
Thrills you with flattering music from far lands
You scarce dare dream of; though rills past you run,
Babbling way-farers, bound for venturous seas.

IV.

LONG have we lived together, and have seen
Things strange and unaccustomed. No arm-chair
Hugging a table built with books 'neath fair
Shelves, the calm scholar's undisturbed demesne;
No library where science reigns, a queen,
O'er students mustering in the lifeless air
Of manuscripts by myriads; no such lair
Brought thee to birth!—But 'neath the heavens serene;
Where Zinal's mighty glaciers toss their crests
Ridged into frozen billows; where the pines
Enfold Argentière 'neath yon cleft ravine
Snowward ascending; where bland summer shines
On shores and towers Italian; thou hast been
Cradled and rocked to life on Nature's breasts.

v.

WELTERING Biscayan waves, Sicilian sea
Where Galatea sports in April noons,
Flamingo-haunted lakes and low lagoons
By desert Carthage, bare Epipolæ,
Deep alder-shaded streams in Chamonix,
Perugia white with frost 'neath wintry moons,
Siena's roseate walls, transparent Junes
And autumn calms in Venice, nurtured thee.
And thou the long long months of cold hast known,
Here 'mid these mountains; months by comradeship
Of thee made swift and sweet; hast taken tone
Sterner and firmer from the fellowship
Of pines and stainless skies and stars that sail
In silence o'er the still snow-sheeted vale.

VI.

FAREWELL! The men who greet thee, greet a book,
For better or for worse. These volumes they
Welcome; or wearily pursue their way,
Casting upon thy leaves a casual look.
Who knows what pangs begot thee, what throes shook
Thy cradle? This new history, they say,
Claims some attention from us for a day:
No Nile of learning this, a garrulous brook.
Nay, let men talk. There is an irony
I' the fate that waits for books. Thy face, O friend,
Hath for my soul a story, which 't were vain
To ask the unkindly world to comprehend.
Nay, have we not our secret? I would fain
Veil from the sight of men thy mystery.

ART AND POETRY.

THE SONNET.

I.

THE Sonnet is a fruit which long hath slept
And ripened on life's sun-warmed orchard-wall;
A gem which, hardening in the mystical
Mine of man's heart, to quenchless flame hath leapt;
A medal of pure gold art's nympholept
Stamps with love's lips and brows imperial;
A branch from memory's briar, whereon the fall
Of thought-eternalising tears hath wept:
A star that shoots athwart star-steadfast heaven;
A fluttering aigrette of tossed passion's brine;
A leaf from youth's immortal missal torn;
A bark across dark seas of anguish driven;
A feather dropped from breast-wings aquiline;
A silvery dream shunning red lips of morn.

II.

THERE is no mood, no heart-throb fugitive,
No spark from man's imperishable mind,
No moment of man's will, that may not find
Form in the Sonnet; and thenceforward live
A potent elf, by art's imperative
Magic to crystal spheres of song confined;—
As in the moonstone's orb pent spirits wind
'Mid dungeon depths day-beams they take and give.
Spare thou no pains; carve thought's pure diamond
With fourteen facets scattering fire and light:—
Uncut, what jewel burns but darkly bright?
And Prospero vainly waves his runic wand,
If spurning art's inexorable law,
In Ariel's prison-sphere he leave one flaw.

III.

THE Sonnet is a world, where feelings caught
In webs of phantasy, combine and fuse
Their kindred elements 'neath mystic dews
Shed from the ether round man's dwelling wrought;
Distilling heart's content, star-fragrance fraught
With influences from the breathing fires
Of heaven in everlasting endless gyres
Enfolding and encircling orbs of thought.
Our Sonnet's world hath two fixed hemispheres:
This, where the sun with fierce strength masculine
Pours his keen rays and bids the noonday shine:
That, where the moon and stars, concordant powers,
Shed milder rays, and daylight disappears
In low melodious music of still hours.

MUSIC PAST AND PRESENT.

OH for those first song-poets! They who sent
Man's voice aloft on wings that sought the skies,
Sustained and steadied for that great emprize
By the majestic disemburdenment
Of man's heart's message in a calm content—
Clear rhythmic utterance, full-formed melodies!
The jubilant soul, struggling with tears and sighs,
Hung on those notes and shared that song's ascent.
Our learned tone-poets in these latter times
Scorn the pure vocal instrument of song.
Man's voice with thrilled man's soul no longer chimes.
And though brass tubes and trembling strings prolong
Bacchantic rapture that to earth's height climbs,
The voice that freed the spirit suffers wrong.

MUSIC.

For a Picture.

"WHO art thou?" "Music." "Prithee tell me why
Thy listening ear is bent to yonder shell?"
"Because the sounds of Nature sink and swell
Within its spiry hollows, and I try
To read aright that rhythmic harmony."
"But in thy hand there hangs a written scroll?"
"What the world tells, the ever wakeful soul
Reasoning records in symbolled charactry."
"Thus the rude things of sense by thought refined
Are made immortal?" "Yea: 't is mine through art,
Framing a message for the watchful mind
More clear than words, to soothe or stir the heart."
"But why these lutes and viols on the ground?"
"They reconstruct dumb thought to speaking sound."

THE POETS OF OUR AGE.

A THOUSAND voices, thrice ten thousand tones,
Various as North and South, as Heaven and Hell,
Compound one dim confused anarchic swell
Of pæans, dirges, odes, love-lyrics, groans.
Upon those ancient ermine-mantled thrones
Where poets erewhile sat, clamber pell-mell
A rout of chattering monkeys taught to spell.
Earth hears and shudders through her patient zones.
Still, though mobs storm Parnassus, why should we
Shrink from this advent of democracy?
Soul, know thyself! Each woman, man, girl, boy,
Of all those myriads who assail thine ears,
Hath, as thou hast, some urgent grief or joy.
Thee too, like them, the earth long-suffering hears.

A PORTRAIT.

WIDE lucid eyes in cavernous orbits set,
Aflame like living opals or the sea,
Vibrant with floods of electricity,
The soul projected in each fiery jet:
This thy fierce fascination haunts me yet;
And I have dreamed all Venice into thee,
Her domes of pearl, her heaven's immensity,
And superhuman saints of Tintoret.
Hoarse-voiced art thou as Tritons of her brine;
Swift as man-snaring murderous ocean shark;
White as foam-wreaths blown over Lido's line;
Stealthy as bats that skim those waves at dark;
Storm-browed with curls of thunder; leonine
As the winged guardian war-beast of St. Mark.

ANGELO RIBELLO.

REBELLIOUS Angel! Were it mine the skill
Of those first Titans, Titian, Veronese,
Or him the master mightier-winged than these,
Thy Tintoret who reigns o'er Venice still;
I would compel thee, by art's crucible
Severing the soul's ore from gross earthly lees,
To reassume amid heaven's hierarchies
Thy station, purged, pure, and of perfect will.
A warrior angel, thou with those shouldst stand
Who guard our Lady round her throne of light;
And in thy puissant grasp a gleaming brand;
And all about thy shoulders armour bright;
But I would have thine eyes even as they are,
Gazing from steel-clad brows, each orb a star.

THREE SUCCESSIVE PORTRAITS OF THE SAME FACE.

(*Boyhood, Youth, Maturity.*)

LINKED to the past by no plain piety,
But straining personality from strife
In dark shrill chasms of anguished inner life,
The final soul emerges.—You can see
What full fair fruitage of humanity
That face in boyhood promised.—Next the flame
Of desperate will devouring some deep shame
Breaks from those young worn brows defiantly.—
Here a third self unfolds: the man, burned hard,
Bathed in black Fafnir's gore, no longer clean,
No longer dubious, springs erect between
Gulfs that gape fore and aft; life's ways are barred
To left and right; while he, stern-eyed, serene,
Faces all fate and stands full-armed on guard.

TO A SICILIAN OF TO-DAY.

WERE mine the hand, the archangelical brain,
Of him who, when faith ruined and hope was barred,
Set those marmoreal presences on guard
In San Lorenzo, art should *thus* arraign
The Genius of Rebellion and Disdain:
Like thine his throat; like thine his forehead scarred
With lightnings; thin tense lips, and diamond-hard
Flash of implacable eyes defying pain.
Thou shouldst emerge in breathing bronze or stone
Brutus, the patriot traitor, at whose shrine
Kneel they whose threats shake tyrants on their throne;
Or, from thy fiery tomb by pride up-borne,
Shouldst frown the soul's self of that Florentine
Whose curled mouth held the Inferno in great scorn.

THE BIRTH OF JACOPO ROBUSTI.

'MID the seventh sphere, where Seraphs stand at gaze,
Shrouded with fire unquenchable before
The throne of thrones built on that sapphire floor
With jacinth, topaz, emerald, chrysoprase,
God bending earthward through the orb of rays
Woven by multitudinous saints for ever more
Prostrate in adoration, spake: "Of yore
Yon sea-girt city sounded with my praise;
Now is the voice of those that sought me dead
In Venice; therefore, O thou youngest-eyed
Of all heaven's angels, thou whose wings are yet
Scarce fledged, obscure the lightnings of thy head
In human flesh; for seventy suns abide
And bear me witness; be thou Tintoret!"

JUVENILIA.

FROM FRIEND TO FRIEND.

OH friend, I know not if such days and nights
Of fervent comradeship as we have spent,
Or if twin minds with equal ardour bent
To search the world's unspeakable delights,
Or if long hours passed on Parnassian heights
Together in rapt interminglement
Of heart with heart on thought sublime intent,
Or if the spark of heaven-born fire that lights
Love in both breasts from boyhood, thus have wrought
Our spirits to communion; but I swear
That neither chance nor change nor time nor aught
That makes the future of our lives less fair,
Shall sunder us who once have breathed this air
Of soul-commingling friendship passion-fraught.

DEAD LOVE.

O LOVE, dear Love, I sit and sing to thee;
And from sere reeds sought in the wintry brake,
Hoarse reeds wherethrough the winds wail mournfully,
And the waves wash, a funeral pipe I make:
For thou art dead, dear Love, and never more
Melodious movements of the breathing spring
Shall thaw thy blood, or spread thy pinions frore,
Or stir thy mute cold throat to carolling.
These reeds shall bloom and rustle to the breath
Of minstrel winds in April; birds shall sweep,
And summer flies shall quiver; but thy death
Is unrelenting as the marble sleep
Which binds Endymion: his eternal swoon
Breaks to no kisses of the passionate moon.

AT WAKING.

THIS morning's light scarce sent a glimmering ray
Through my blank window, when I woke to think;
And then, as one who, hidden far away
In some cathedral, hears the cadence sink
Through alien aisles, and the great fugue again
Breathe sure and solemn on a storm of sound;
So from my tangled dreams there grew a pain
At first scarce felt, and round it vaguely wound
The trouble of my slumber; but when sleep
Moved from my soul, as clouds from mountains move,
The pain waxed stronger; till, with a sudden leap,
Full-formed it burst upon me—all thy love,
Words, letters, looks, revenge, and cold disdain—
A tumult of mixed passion—smote my brain.

THE PASSING OF THE CLOUD.

AS when the moon, some sultry summer night,
Broods in the bosom of a labouring cloud,
And scarcely shoots a swart uncertain light
Through the dull volumes of her vapoury shroud;
But, on a sudden, breathing winds arise
And part the veil, and she looks forth again
To scan the silent earth with silver eyes,
Disclosing tower and town and bosky plain;
So for three days my soul in darkness dwelt,
Shadowed by unintelligible gloom,
Till, stirred by secret impulses, she felt
Her light revive and burst the dolorous tomb,
And burning clear beheld that all is fair
And good and perfect in the tranquil air.

MI RACCOMANDO A TE.

HELP me! My years flow on, slow sliding years
That pass unruffled like a sleepy stream.
Help me! I know not whether I live or dream;
What is, I may not part from what appears.
Help me! I lie obscure in a low cave;
You stand above me, and you take the sun
I see not, full upon your forehead: one
Swift ray reflected from your eyes may pave
A path for me to rise by: send down light;
Send ray on ray, and build the road divine;
Gaze still more strongly, till that splendour shine
With fire able to pierce my spirit's night,
And draw me sunward. So our lives shall be
In endless day joined indissolubly.

FIAT LUX.

LET there be Light! What sound, as of the roar
Of breakers surging from a bottomless sea,
What brightness of a new sun suddenly
Launched on the void to roll for evermore,
Smote the still soul that desolate before
Lay slumberous in her dungeon's misery,
Distant from God and man and earth and thee?
O love, behold her spread strong wings and soar!
She lives; she loves; her heavenward flight is free.
It was thy voice, thy touch, that, quivering o'er
The bonds that bound her, loosed them rapturously.
She spurns her chains, and from the prison door
Leaps forth, a new and lustrous thing, to be
Buoyed on the beams that from thy radiance pour.

THE MAGIC ISLE.

I.

THERE is an island hidden far away,
Round which life's ocean streams and beats and raves;
But never can his most unquiet waves
Break rudely there: so strong, so clear a lay
Floats from the shore, of flutes and lutes, the sound
Of maidens singing with shrill voice divine,
Of youths whose hair drops down with odorous wine,
Whose deep broad chests heave with a joy profound.
Above them droops the vine, and flowers below
Sphere the still air with fragrance; the blue sea
Panting beneath their music tremblingly
Kisses the deep blue sky, wherein there glow
Love's lights for ever. 'Tis a halcyon clime,
Withdrawn from change and chance and envious time.

II.

LOVE leads thee to this isle! Oh, follow him;
Be his obedient vassal! Day and night,
Sunsetting and sunrising, the swift light
Alternating with stars and moonbeams dim,
For thee shall be one splendour; and for thee
The ceaseless songs of seraphim shall rise
Like altar-flames through incandescent skies,
Praising the Lord their God continually.
Oh, follow, follow! Cease, fond wretch, to eat
Thy heart sore laden with a sorry care!
Love breathes, and hovering through the fragrant air,
Their wings a thousand unseen Zephyrs beat,
Fanning thy brow, cooling thy feverish head,
Spreading for thee a smooth Elysian bed.

LOVE'S IDOLATRY.

HOW do thine eyes excuse idolatry,
My saint, to whom at rise and set of sun
Thus on my yearning spirit's bended knee
With purest vows I pay mine orison!
Thine eyes the temples are of holiest love,
Whereto my soul makes hourly pilgrimage,
Suing for wings to lift her flight above
This house of flesh that clips her like a cage.
Thine eyes are fountains of perennial health,
To which in sick and weary mood I fly;
Thine eyes are priceless mines of heavenly wealth,
Stored with high truths and sweet divinity.
Then call me not idolater, but see
How firm my faith who kneel and worship thee.

RENUNCIATION.

I.

AH, what a pain is here! All through the night
I yearned for power, and nursed rebellious scorn,
Striving against high heaven in hot despite
Of wavering nerves and will by passion torn.
I dreamed; and on the curtain of the gloom
False memory drew an idyll of old hope,
Singing a lullaby to mock my doom
With love far off and joy beyond my scope.
I woke; the present seemed more sad than hell;
On daily tasks my sullen soul I cast;
But, as I worked, a deeper sorrow fell
Like thunder on my spirit; for she past
Before the house with wondering wide blue eye
That said, "I wait! why will you not reply?"

II.

MY heart was hot and answered: "What might be!
Love, peace, content, the plenitude of strength;
She offers it of all convention free:
Wilt thou not take and eat and rest at length?
Her brows are framed of beauty, and her soul
Sits throned within her eyelids orbed in light;
And from her parted lips harmonious roll
Full floods of music, rivers of delight!"
Oh, heart, false heart! why tear'st thou me again?
"To touch, to handle, stretching forth thy palm
To sleep forgetful of sharp self-disdain;
It were so easy, and so sweet the calm!"
Calm as the salt dead lake; easy as sin;
Sweet as love-apples hiding dust within.

THE FALL OF A SOUL.

I SAT unsphering Plato ere I slept:
Then through my dream the choir of gods was borne,
Swift as the wind and lustrous as the morn,
Fronting the night of stars; behind them swept
Tempestuous darkness o'er a drear descent,
Wherethrough I saw a crowd of charioteers
Urging their giddy steeds with cries and cheers
To join the choir that aye before them went:
But one there was who fell, with broken car
And horses swooning down the gulf of gloom;
Heavenward his eyes, though prescient of their doom,
Reflected glory like a falling star;
While with wild hair blown back and listless hands
Ruining he sank toward undiscovered lands.

O SI, O SI!

O FOR that bath whose medicinal balm
Made wrinkled age and life-long weariness
Exchange their torturing thorn-crown for the palm
Of golden youth that shadows but to bless!
O for that river whose oblivious stream
Drowned thoughts of things ill done and pain and wrong,
Blotting the past like a delusive dream
From which we wake with prayer and morning song!
O for that horse whose steady pinions soar
Upward from earth and sorrow and false joy
Into the heavens that change not evermore,
Where anguish cannot plague nor pleasure cloy!
Health is Medea's bath, thy sorest need;
Content is Lethe; Faith, the wingèd steed!

IN MEMORIAM.

THREE comrade elms with leafy arms enlaced
Guarded through sun and shade a hundred years
Yon hill-set house majestical, that rears
Its solitary bulk so proudly based.
Alike they grew, with equal beauty graced
Of boughs aërial; three giant peers:
Together shed their leaves like autumn's tears,
And took the storms of winter close embraced.
Now they are gone; the twain were cut away;
The third, left sorrowful without a mate,
Waved heavy branches to the breeze of May;
Till on the dawning of a tranquil day,
Bending his comely head, subdued by fate,
He bowed and fell, heart-broken, desolate.

A SISTER OF THE POOR.

KNEW you this lady? She was one whom God
Loved greatly; yet the proud ones of the land
Eyed her askance, what time rough paths she trod
And wild waste places, with an angel's hand
Soothing intolerable anguish. Men
By maddening fever fretted, orphans thrown
Like fruit untimely on the barren stone
Of city streets, babes in the stifling den
Of crime and famine to her bosom pressed —
These knew her. As a folded lily keeps
Whiteness unstained on stony Alpine steeps,
Even so this maiden in the festering nest
Of sin and sickness blossomed. Now she sleeps
Pure with the pure, and with the saints at rest.

TO THE UNSEEN BEAUTY.

I WILL arise and come to Thee. The juice
Of gravest herbs, poppy and pale henbane,
Shall bead my forehead and confuse my brain
With fierce intoxication, life's long truce.
Too true there is no road from hence but Death;
And that perchance to Nothing: yet blank naught
Were better than the anguish of such thought
As we draw daily with our deepest breath.
I know not what compels me; but thy form
Still beckons; and I hear a voice that says:
"Pass forth; for ever flow the lengthening days;
For ever swells the elemental storm;
And thou art nothing; lay thee on the knees
Of Doom, and take thine everlasting ease."

THE PLOVERS.

LATE on the moors I heard the plovers cry.
A waning moon was up, and sulky rack
Swept in torn squadrons ominously black
O'er the scant larches as the wind wailed by.
There was no hope that night in earth or sky:
The lute-chords of my life hung faint and slack,
Vibrating keenly when athwart our track
I rather felt than saw those mourners fly:
For ever and for ever doomed to range
The wilderness, the darkness and the storm,
While other birds of air are nested warm
In tufts of ivy or 'neath sheltering grange;
Since each, a man, beside the cross had stood
And mocked Christ in His dying solitude.

A BOY'S VOICE BROKEN.

SUMMER hath come! The world is ripe for song!
Pant forth thy passionate pain, thou nightingale!
Brown moonlight fills the broad ambrosial vale,
Where deep-embowered I wait and listen long!—
So cried the boy. When, hark, the hurrying throng
Of thick notes preluding that final wail!
Thrilled by the sound divine, his lips grew pale;
Some god unknown within his heart was strong.—
Then silence fell. He, soaring on the wings
Of song, poured his soul forth in rivalry:
Till, at heaven's height, where the rapt spirit springs
By one-quick bound up to infinity,
The boy's voice failed. Love's hour had come. The lute
On which Love plays, must first be smitten mute.

A COAT OF ARMS.

THREE golden trefoils starred on an azure field:
Bearing these blazoned arms, my fathers fought;
I in this age when heraldries are naught,
Have found life's oriflamme limned in their shield.
What though nor bickering brand nor lance I wield,
Yet 'neath this ensign have I lived and thought;
Yea, whatsoe'er these hands and brain have wrought,
With one same triple treble sign is sealed.
Faith, Hope, and Love; Religion, Conduct, Art;
Truth, Beauty, Good; trifoliate trinities;
Trefoils triune, conjoining head, will, heart
In threefold concord; thrice-linked harmonies,
Tripartite, trisubstantiate; these three
Made, make, shall make what lives and lasts in me.

MORGENLIED.

AT Mürren let the morning lead thee out
To walk upon the cold and cloven hills;
To hear the congregated mountains shout
Their pæan of a thousand foaming rills.
Raimented with intolerable light
The snow-peaks stand above thee, row on row
Arising, each a seraph in his might;
An organ each of varied stop doth blow.
Heaven's azure dome trembles through all her spheres
Feeling that music vibrate; and the Sun
Raises his tenor as he upward steers;
And all the glory-coated mists that run
Beneath him in the valley, hear his voice,
And cry unto the dewy fields: Rejoice!

AN AUTUMN DAY.

A SOUL is in the sunlight. Not one breath
Troubles the stainless and translucent sky.
Methinks the spirits of the mountains fly
Heavenward like flames. Blue air encompasseth
The congregated Alps that lift on high
Their crownèd brows, to hear what Summer saith.
She, having whispered, will depart; and death
Comes in the clasp of Winter by-and-by.
Hushed are the pines. There is no stir, no strife,
No fretful wailing of frore winds that blow
Earth's winding-sheet of cold uncoloured snow.
This morn, upon the brink of dying, Life
Draws a deep draught of peace, and rapture thrills
Through all the pulses of the impassioned hills.

ON THE HILL-SIDE.

THE winds behind me in the thicket sigh,
The bees fly droning on laborious wing,
Pink cloudlets scarcely float across the sky,
September stillness broods o'er everything.
Deep peace is in my soul: I seem to hear
Catullus murmuring, "Let us live and love;
Suns rise and set and fill the rolling year
Which bears us deathward, therefore let us love;
Pour forth the wine of kisses, let them flow,
And let us drink our fill before we die."
Hush! in the thicket still the breezes blow;
Pink cloudlets sail across the azure sky;
The bees warp lazily on laden wing;
Beauty and stillness brood o'er everything.

TO CHRYSANTHEMUMS.

LATE comers! Ye, when autumn's wealth is past;
When pale October strips the yellowing leaves;
When on our garden lawns and dripping eaves
The rain-soaked foliage of the elm is cast;
When 'neath grey skies the wild Atlantic blast
Searches the flower-bed for each bloom that cleaves
To blackening tendrils; when November weaves
Fret-work of frost, and winter frowns at last;
Ye in the year's decay and death of hope
Dawn with your hues auroral, hues of rose,
Saffron and ivory, amber, amethyst;
More delicate, more dear, more true than those
Gay blossoms which the July sunbeams kissed,
Purer of scent than honeyed heliotrope.

ROSA.

WHAT flowers for thee, dearest? What flowers for thee?
Red roses for my rose, and azure eyes
Of gentian steadfast as thy constancy?
Pearl-cupped anemones, and silver sighs
Of fragile lilies breathed by the faint wind?
All these are gone; swift summer spreads her wing,
And bears them southward, leaving naught behind
But sober crocuses, that meek the spring
With lilac modesty—how pale and prim
By those gay flaunting chalices of gold,
Which the voluptuous prime with fire did brim!
Yet, since Love deems no duteous service cold,
These will I pluck, and bind them on thy brow,
Saying, "Their hues are meek and chaste as thou."

"JE SUIS TROP JEUNE."

LEAVE me awhile; I am too young to love;
My maiden fancies are enough for me:
Leave me awhile; too soon will passion move
The silent springs of my virginity.
You break my dream, wither my girlhood's flower,
With vows and kisses and soft whispered sighs;
And offer what? The homage of an hour,
The sad sweet service of adoring eyes.
And then you fly. 'T is honour bids you go:
You think it virtue to have left me maid;
You smile "Uncropped by me her rose shall blow,
Her bridal kiss on worthier lips be laid."
But give me, stranger, give me back, I pray,
The heart's ease that was mine but yesterday!

HERE AND THERE.

LA RETRAITE.

Written on the last page of a gift-book.

OLD books, old flowers, old feelings, foliage pressed
By Time, who lays the stony weight of years
Upon our palpitating hopes and fears,
The scented herbage of our throbbing breast!
These leaves I turn, on a vague scholar's quest,
In search of some frail thought that disappears;
But meet, instead, the broad soul-haunted meres
Of memory, and the friend's face I love best.
Dearest, this book I gave you years ago:
I find it now in Florence; and I write,
Here by your hearth, words you may never know.
Live well; live happy. Short is day, but bright.
The Bersaglieri on the flags below
Cry: Comes for us, for you, for all the night!

THE STROLLING MUSICIAN.

TEN francs and twice five cents were in my purse:
I counted them while those brown wanderers plied
Shrill cornet, wheezy fife, cracked ophicleide,
Making such music as provoked a curse.
Still, as they blew, from bad to strident worse
The strife of deepening dissonances cried;
Till, when the soul of pity sank and died,
The hat went round; and then, by fate perverse,
The lad who bore it showed so fair a face—
So sweet a smile on pure pale lips by down
Of earliest manhood fringed, so musical
A laughter in dark dream-eyes with the brown
Cluster of curls o'ershadowed—that his grace
Brought concord home: cents, francs, he took them all!

THE JEWS' CEMETERY.

Lido of Venice.

I.

A TRACT of sand swept by the salt sea foam,
Fringed with acacia flowers, and billowy-deep
In meadow grasses, where tall poppies sleep,
And bees athirst for wilding honey roam.
How many a bleeding heart hath found its home
Under these hillocks which the sea-mews sweep!
Here knelt an outcast race to curse and weep,
Age after age, 'neath heaven's unanswering dome!
Sad is the place, and solemn. Grave by grave,
Lost in the dunes, with rank weeds overgrown,
Pines in abandonment; as though unknown,
Uncared for, lay the dead, whose records pave
This path neglected; each forgotten stone
Wept by no mourner but the moaning wave.

II.

WHILE thus I mused, the genius of the spot
Rose in my soul, rebuking me, and said :
You wrong these patient and heroic dead,
Whose trust, although He slew them, wavered not!
You wrong the living! Israel ne'er forgot
His forefathers, lapped in earth's narrow bed.
Each grave is known and named and numbered.
You misconceive the tranquil tragic lot
Of lives so fallen on sleep! Secure of God,
Merged in the deathless memory of their race,
These wait. And if your callous feet have trod
Blank tombs that to the bare skies turn their face,
From faith here prostrate learn to kiss the rod,
From contrite hope here learn to sue for grace!

BEFORE THE DAWN.

Between Bel Alp and Brieg.

A FULL moon sinking in the west; a beam
Of morn uprising from the orient skies:
Dim meadow-ways beneath, where the dew lies
And flowers of autumn crocus faintly gleam.
Through the hushed pines, beside the hurrying stream,
We downward fare, while bells of dawning rise
From unseen hamlets, and before our eyes
The solid world looms like a twilight dream.
High up in Heaven above the unfading snow,
Laved by strong ocean floods of confluent light,
A sole star shines. Within that restless spark
Ruby and sapphire mingle, shoot, and glow.
Thus burns faith's Phosphor-orb, intensely bright,
Betwixt heaven's day-spring and earth's dolorous dark.

BEFORE THE DAWN.

At Città di Castello.

AS one who stands before a picture set
In ebon framework, so in dreams of night
I gazed upon broad mountains, billowy bright
With rays ineffable—a window let
Into the wall of blackness; and while yet
My spirit pondered, on my dreaming sight
This legend flashed in letters fiery white:
THESE BE THE HILLS OF HEAVEN. FORGO. FORGET.
Then came who called me, and I rose, and went
Along the moonlit city walls, where roll
The springs of Tiber; and through copse and dell
Fared in the light malign: but wonderment
Of that strange dream possessed me, and my soul
Yearned for the Hills of Heaven like one in hell.

A CRUCIFIX IN THE ETSCH THAL.

BLUE mists lie curled along the sullen stream :
Clouds furl the pine-clad highlands whence we came :
Stage after stage, interminably tame,
Stretch the gaunt mountain-flanks without one gleam.
All things are frozen in a dull dead dream :
It is a twilight land without a name :
Each half-awakened hamlet seems the same
Home of grey want and misery supreme.
Heart-breaking is the world-old human strife
With niggard nature traced adown this vale
In records fugitive as human life.
Ah Christ ! The land is thine. Those tortured eyes,
That thorn-crowned brow, those mute lips, thin and pale,
Appeal from man's pain to the impiteous skies.

MONTE GENEROSO.

I.

Morning Clouds.

MORN hath gone forth. The symphony sublime
Of dawning closeth on that final blare
Of the sun's trumpets blown in saffron air.
Now to their thrones on the world's watch-towers climb
The congregated clouds, that through the prime
Dwelt like a ruffled lake, motionless there
From Apennine to Alp, o'er cities fair
Veiled as God's thoughts are veiled by brooding Time.
They stir, they soar; driven by no blast of wind,
But self-impelled, like travelling bisons swayed
By instinct of some slow compulsive mind,
They sweep the plain's face, and the hills invade;
Then, coiled around this crag, heaven's radiance blind,
And forge the noonday thunder's cannonade.

II.

Early Summer.

MEADOWS with asphodel and lily flowers
O'er-silvered, as our English fields in May
Are gilt with buttercups; wind-ruffled hay
Exhaling summery spice in noontide hours;
Bare crested crags, gaunt battlemented towers,
Purple with silk-enwoven peony spray;
Each black-browed ledge, where late the snow-wreaths lay,
Plumed with auriculas and dewed with showers!
June then is here! The barren hill-sides glow
With gentians, and waist-high the giant stands
Girt with laburnum blossoms amber-pale;
Where girls from chestnut-shadowed homesteads go
With brown-cheeked lads, laughing and clasping hands,
'Neath golden-green young beech-boughs in the vale.

III.

The Summit, at Evening.

As on the main Atlantic, onward driven
By winds that mound the unfathomable deep
Into ridged billows, a good ship will creep
High to the crest and hang 'twixt sea and heaven;
So have we climbed this summit, whence 'tis given
With unobstructed view at ease to sweep
The illimitable champaign, towns that sleep
In twilight, storm-swathed Alps by lightnings riven.
The bells of evening rise from village towers
Far, far below; while evening silence steals
Down from the crags and chasms of our hill,
To lawns o'er-snowed with faint narcissus flowers
Paling the sward 'neath pendulous abeles,
Where spring, earth's pure Proserpina, breathes still.

ON CLASSICAL THEMES.

TO THE LOVED ONE OF THE POET.

(*After Theognis.*)

LO, I have given thee plumes wherewith to skim
The unfathomed deep, and lightly hover around
Earth's huge circumference. Thou shalt be found
At banquets on the breath of pæan and hymn:
To shrill-voiced pipes with lips of seraphim
Lovely young men thy rapturous fame shall sound:
Yea, when thou liest lapped in the noiseless ground,
Thy name shall live, nor shall oblivion dim
Thy dawn of splendour. For these lands, these isles,
These multitudinous waves of refluent seas,
Shall be thy pleasure-ground wherethrough to roam,
Borne by no steeds, but wafted by the smiles
Of Muses violet-crowned, whose melodies,
While earth endures, shall make all earth thy home.